

March 7, 2012

## Testimony Concerning Raised Bill No. 253

Ralph E. Slater, Board of Trustees

Connecticut Dog Federation

Chairman Meyer, Chairman Roy, and Members of the Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony relative to Raised Bill No. 253. To that end, I offer the following:

### Position Statement Relative To

#### Raised Bill No. 253 An Act Concerning Revisions to the Animal Importation Statutes

The Connecticut Dog Federation (CDF) **OPPOSES** Raised Bill No. 253.

CDF is an association of forty dog clubs representing approximately two thousand residents of this state. They support the mission of CDF which includes the encouragement and promotion of the welfare of dogs. That interest includes not only pure bred dogs, but also those that are in need of rescue and adoption regardless of their parentage. Many of those clubs provide rescue and adoption services for their specific breeds.

Until last year, the State of Connecticut had failed for too long to recognize that uncontrolled importation of "rescued" animals into the state for "adoption" caused several adverse effects, including: (1) putting at risk the health of its citizens and their lawfully bred and owned animals by contagious diseases and potentially deadly parasites carried in imported animals, (2) subjecting many unwary recipients of such animals to extraordinary veterinary bills for treatment of undisclosed diseases or infirmities, and (3) depriving healthy animals in state pounds and shelters the chance for legitimate adoption. Loss of tax revenue from undisclosed "adoption" transactions was also significant.

Fortunately, Public Act No. 11-187 addressed the shortcomings noted above. It defined, and established the registration procedure for, an "animal importer", required importation activities to be revealed to cognizant state and local officials, and established a schedule for examinations of an imported animal by a Connecticut licensed veterinarian. The new requirements in that act for animal importers are similar to those in existing general statutes for kennel operators and pet shops, a very logical approach to more equal oversight. In addition, they establish a relatively even playing field for all concerned. More importantly, however, they promote public safety by mandating a thorough screening of imported

animals upon arrival for diseases that can be transmitted to Connecticut residents, both human and animal.

Certain provisions of this bill would strip out essential provisions of Public Act No. 11-187:

- Eliminating the requirement in Section 2, Subsection (a) that provision be made for the examination of an animal by a Connecticut licensed veterinarian within forty-eight hours of arrival would be a significant error. The reasoning behind such deletion appears to be that any examination report by a veterinarian at the source state or country is true and authentic. The reality: too many such reports cannot be accepted as honest or factual. The public health would be in serious jeopardy from the time of animal arrival until the required examination by a veterinarian not more than fifteen days prior to sale, adoption or transfer. Should the public be put at risk during this undetermined period of time? Of course not.
- The proposed changes in the definition of "animal importer" in Section 1, Subsection (e)(3) could have a significant negative effect on regulating the importation process. (1) The addition of the "intent" test to the existing "purpose" test should be examined in depth. Would an importer be able to attest that, at the time of animal arrival, he had no intent to offer the animal for sale, adoption or transfer, thus exempting him from this section of the statutes? (2) Adding "after such dog or cat enters the state" as another test of importer would merely permit the importer to specify that his sale, adoption or transfer activities occurred outside of this state, and he merely transports the animals as a courtesy to the buyer, adopter or receiver of the transferred animal.

CDF respects the various organizations that provide dedicated, legitimate services for the rescue and adoption of animals into loving homes. Most of those organizations are able to follow appropriate procedures, including timely examinations by veterinarians, for the animals under their care using available resources. They are not under the umbrella of certain groups that charge large "adoption" fees for "doomed" animals "rescued" from "overcrowded and understaffed" animal shelters in other states and countries.

This bill is a major step backward in requiring reasonable accountability for importers of animals that are not licensed pet shops or suppliers to such pet shops. Umbrella groups that have previously engaged in unscrupulous "rescue" activities will be able to operate once more in the voids proposed in this bill, to the detriment of the animals involved, to the unsuspecting victims of those activities, and to the general public health.

The provisions of Public Act 11-1187 have been in force for a mere five months. It seems rather premature to propose such drastic changes before the full and lasting effects of that act are known. The changes would return the Department of Agriculture to its former position as observer of virtually uncontrolled animal trafficking, with no statutory authority to correct the attendant problems. An unsuspecting public would again be at risk of purchasing animals with undisclosed diseases and infirmities. Is all of this worth accommodating those who claim hardship under the revised statute? NO!